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THE PAN-AMERICAN CONFERENCE.

BY M. ROMERO, MEXICAN MINISTER TO THE UNITED STATES.

I.

ALTHOUGH the idea of assembling a congress wherein all the American nations should be represented is not a new one,—as it originated when they accomplished their independence, and was brought about in South America by its liberator, Bolivar, very heartily supported in this country by Henry Clay, then Secretary of State,—the Hon. James G. Blaine can be properly considered as the originator in this country of the movement which resulted in the recent International American Conference. He first proposed it in 1881, when he served as Secretary of State for the first time, under President Garfield's administration. He then limited the object of such a conference to the negotiation of an agreement for the purpose of settling by arbitration all differences that might arise between American nations.

The change of administration which soon afterwards took place, following the assassination of President Garfield, caused this idea to be abandoned, as at that time it had not been well received. Chili was engaged in a war with Peru and Bolivia, and some thought that the proposed conference was an attempt to interfere in that difficulty. Mexico also received it very coolly, for she had then a boundary question pending with Guatemala, and Mr. Blaine had proposed that the President of the United States should arbitrate thereon. But, unfortunately, the way in which he made the offer indicated an opinion unfavorable to the rights of Mexico, which were based on undeniable historical facts; and for this and other reasons the proposal was not accepted. The idea remained latent in this country, however, and it was revived under President Cleveland's administration, although without any intervention on his part. It was brought forward in the House of Representa-

tives by Mr. McCreary, a distinguished Democratic Representative from Kentucky, and in the Senate by Mr. Frye, the distinguished Republican Senator from Maine. These facts show that it was not taken up as a political measure, since it was supported by both the parties which have struggled for the ascendancy in this country. President Cleveland's administration did not second the proposal in an active manner ; all it did was not to oppose it.

The personal views of the new promotor of the project were not limited to arbitration, but embraced every subject which might affect the relations of the United States with the other American republics. To avoid opposition, it was necessary to accept new suggestions which came up during the discussion of the bill. Finally, the act of May 24, 1888, embraced eight different subjects which the Conference was called upon to consider, some of them covering even four branches.

From this plain statement of facts it appears that Mr. Blaine had nothing to do with the enactment of the law which convened the Conference, and therefore he is not, and cannot be, responsible for the form in which it was finally approved.

As this law was passed, during a Democratic administration, by a Congress with a Democratic majority in the House of Representatives, although the Republican party had control of the Senate, it was natural that it should embrace several of the principles contained in the platform of the dominant party, as, for instance, those referring to the development of foreign trade and to a silver coin of uniform fineness and weight to be a legal-tender in all the American nations. It was natural, too, that the delegates of the United States, appointed by a Republican administration, should represent the protection principles of that party, and that, therefore, they would not be eager to accept the measures concerning the development of foreign trade, and would look with concern on the coining of silver into legal-tender money. This is owing to the diversity of political and economic views in the two parties which control this country, and which from time to time attain ascendancy ; and it happens sometimes that one house of Congress is controlled by one party and the other house by the other party. For these reasons, and from the frequent rotation of political parties in the government of the United States, it is very difficult to carry out successfully any

complicated affair which requires complete continuity of views and efforts on the part of all the branches of the government for any length of time.

It may be assumed that, as a general rule, the Latin-American nations, except, perhaps, the Central American states, and two or three of the South American, looked with distrust on the meeting in Washington of an International American Conference, fearing that its object might be to secure the political and commercial ascendancy of the United States on this continent, to the disadvantage of those nations; but this distrust did not go so far as to make them refuse the invitation. Fortunately, when they were invited, there was no serious question pending between the Latin-American states which could prevent their acceptance, as was the case when a conference was suggested in 1881. The invitation was therefore accepted by all the American nations, with the sole exception of San Domingo, which gave as her reason that she thought it unnecessary to be represented in the Conference, because a commercial reciprocity treaty made with the United States in 1884 had not been ratified by this government. Chili declared her acceptance so far as economic questions were concerned, but stated that she would take no part in political questions or arbitration.

Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Colombia, Venezuela, Peru, Chili, the Argentine Republic, and Brazil accredited as delegates to the Conference their ministers resident at Washington; Colombia, Venezuela, the Argentine Republic, and Brazil each sent two more delegates, while Mexico and Chili had each only one more; all the other republics were represented by one delegate each. The delegates from Honduras, Ecuador, and Bolivia were, besides, accredited near the United States government as envoys extraordinary, and those from Chili and Brazil had a similar character before the Conference. The representatives of Salvador, Costa Rica, Paraguay, and Uruguay came only as delegates, as did also the first representative from Hayti. The Uruguayan delegate was the only one who left before the close of the session. The first delegate from Hayti was obliged to return home on account of sickness, and his place was filled by the Haytian minister resident at Washington. The delegates who were accredited as ministers at Washington found out very soon that their official relations to the United States government considerably restricted the liberty

of action enjoyed by those of their colleagues who came in a transient manner.

It has been stated that the Chilian government presented its views to the governments of the Argentine Republic and the empire of Brazil, with a view that the three nations should act in concert in the Conference, and that it had answers which it understood to mean that those governments shared its views in regard to arbitration, and that they all would stand together. Probably this was the reason why the Chilian delegates consented to take part in some discussions relating to arbitration, and did not refrain from voting on that subject, except in the last days of the Conference, when the question had assumed a definite shape and it was plain that their views in this regard were not shared by any other of the South American nations. It is probable that, if Brazil gave Chili assurances that both would act in harmony, the political change which occurred in the former in November last caused a change in its foreign policy. The Argentine delegates declared that their government had not committed itself to Chili on this question.

Although President Cleveland issued the invitation for the Conference, he refrained, out of deference to his successor, from naming the United States delegates, and their appointment was made soon after the present administration was inaugurated. These appointments have been highly censured in some quarters, because it was thought that some of the gentlemen named were not the best fitted for the mission, and some have gone so far as to imagine that their selection was an act of disrespect to the Latin-American nations. Whatever may have been the motive which governed the President of the United States in making the appointments, I am sure that he did not intend to choose as representatives of this country gentlemen of little worth ; much less to show any disrespect to the nations which he had invited to send delegates to Washington. The appointments were made in the manner usual in connection with offices of the highest rank. They were all ratified by the Senate. The gentlemen appointed represented all political parties, all sections of the country, and all branches of its industries ; and they were all very honorable gentlemen. Among them were two ex-Senators, four manufacturers, and two merchants; from which it seems that the intention was to select business men rather than diplomats.

It certainly would have been preferable if all the United States delegates had spoken Spanish and been conversant with diplomatic affairs in general, especially with those of the Latin-American nations. It would have been desirable, also, if all the Latin-American delegates had spoken English and been familiar with the United States ; but the inconvenience which resulted was not essential, and was remedied in some degree by means of an interpreter. Besides, the advantage of knowing both languages was a secondary one compared with all the other qualifications of a delegate.

It is entirely useless, so far as the Latin-American nations are concerned, to inquire whether this government could have selected gentlemen better fitted for the work, because if those appointed had not the necessary qualifications, the United States was the principal sufferer from any embarrassment that resulted.

The habits and manners of the two races represented in the conference are so widely different ; the urbanity of the Latin race is so exquisite, and it attaches so much importance to forms of courtesy and personal attention which, as a general rule, are somewhat disregarded by the Anglo-Saxon race, that, when they came in contact, the contrast was very apparent. It was natural that the Latin-Americans, who did not know the Anglo-Saxon Americans well, should wonder at the simplicity of their manners, which almost looked like discourtesy, and attribute to impoliteness what was only the result of different customs and ways of life. The daily intercourse of the delegates for several months dispelled this impression, which had disappeared almost completely when the Conference adjourned. There were, however, among the United States delegates several who distinguished themselves for their courtesy and conciliatory spirit, very likely because they had been somewhat acquainted with the Latin race.

It was apprehended by some, as already intimated, that the object of the United States in convening the Conference was to obtain decided political and commercial advantages over the other nations of this continent, making them almost its dependencies ; and this view caused decided opposition to the project. There is nothing that can be shown to prove that this was the purpose of the United States. Its delegates did not propose in the Conference anything seemingly intended to accomplish such an end. Judging, therefore, by facts and results, these apprehensions were

entirely ungrounded. In speaking of arbitration and commercial union this will appear more plainly.

There are in South America two nations which have acquired very great importance—one on account of its great territorial extension, its immense natural sources of wealth, favored by an excellent system of navigable rivers, and its extraordinary material progress; the other by its unrivalled position on the Pacific, by possessing almost one-half of the western coast of South America, by its habits of order and labor, and by its rapid career on the road of progress. I refer to the Argentine Republic and to Chili. Although Brazil has a larger territory and population than these two nations together, the political transition which is in progress in that country prevents it, for the present, from being a centre of political combinations. The recent war on the Pacific, whose results are not yet an accomplished fact, naturally caused very great excitement. It was only natural that the nations which were conquered in that war should look upon the Argentine Republic as the centre of strength to maintain the political equilibrium or *status quo*; and that, for the same reasons, they should look with distrust upon Chili and apprehend a repetition of events similar to the war of 1879-1883. It was natural, too, that this political excitement, which is only mentioned here, should be felt in the workings of the Conference, and it is absolutely necessary to take it into consideration to explain some of the incidents which took place in that assembly.

This conflict of political views and interests, however, did not prevent personal and official relations among the South American delegates from being so courteous and cordial that no one who was not aware of the feelings and tendencies of the various countries could perceive that differences existed among them. On almost all questions presented in the Conference they acted in accord: even the Chilian and Argentine delegates did so in the discussion about the rules and, especially, that concerning the minority report on customs union and reciprocity treaties.

Central America is too far from Chili and the Argentine Republic to take any part in their affairs, but she has a pending question of her own—the confederation of the five Central American states—which is a transcendent one, on which, it seems, they are not in complete accord, and which could not fail to influence the conduct of their representatives in the Conference. The

projected Nicaragua Canal is also a source of differences between that state and Costa Rica.

I would not convey an exact idea of the tendencies and apprehensions which prevailed in the Conference, should I omit to say that Guatemala looks at Mexico with distrust, because she imagines that the Mexican government entertains some plans against her—a supposition by no means correct. It was inevitable that this fear should also be felt in the Conference.

Mexico was, if not the only one, one of the few Latin-American nations which could properly be considered as really impartial in regard to the South American questions. On account of the immense distance which separates her from her southern sisters, and the lack of means of communication, which almost wholly prevents commercial relations with them, Mexico has no political interest in the subjects agitated in those countries. Hence she looks upon all the nations of the Southern continent as friends and sisters, and has a most cordial and sincere wish for the prosperity and welfare of each of them. Although Mexico ardently wishes that the principles of equity and justice should prevail among the American nations, and although she might disapprove of the conduct of any of them which, in her opinion, was subversive of those principles, and might even go so far as to express her disapproval, she is not called upon to take any active part in regard to questions which may arise in South America, and, therefore, she is not only neutral, but perfectly impartial.

Perhaps in the beginning this caused the Mexican delegates to be looked upon with some distrust by their colleagues, who feared that they might be disposed to interfere in the South American questions; but the impartial and friendly conduct of those delegates in regard to the sister-republics of South America ought to have satisfied them all that Mexico, so far from having any feelings or views against any South American nation, or any wish to interfere in their questions, had, on the contrary, the most sincere wishes for the preservation of their peace and the promotion of their common welfare.

One of the principal difficulties which arose in the Conference, and which, although apparently insignificant, had an influence that can hardly be appreciated, was caused by the different languages spoken by the delegates. Only one of the United States delegates, Mr. Flint, spoke Spanish; one, Mr. Trescot, could read it; but

the other delegates of the United States knew nothing of it. Several of the Latin-American members, and among them the Argentine delegates, who took such an important part in the proceedings of the Conference, did not speak English, although one of them by the end of the session understood it tolerably well. These circumstances made the services of interpreters indispensable. It is well known how difficult it is to translate a speech properly. Besides a perfect knowledge of the language in which it is delivered and of that into which it is translated, other conditions are required, which seldom are found in any one person, as, for instance, perfect familiarity with the subject matter of the speech, a very good memory, the ability not to forget any of the points made, and great facility of expression for the purpose of translating with correctness and precision, if not with elegance, the views expressed.

The difficulty of correct translations, which was felt more especially in the early sessions of the conference, caused the delegates of quick temper, when they did not understand the ideas expressed in the other language, to misinterpret them, and sometimes to consider them offensive and to give back sharp answers, which provoked sharp retorts, and not only disturbed the harmony among the delegates, but in some cases seemed even to threaten the success of the Conference.

The Conference, when organized, decided, very prudently, to frame a code of rules for its deliberations and decisions, and the committee appointed for that purpose took as a model the rules approved by the South American Congress that met in Montevideo in 1888, which had the advantage of having been put in practice successfully at that congress. Señor Quintana, an Argentine delegate, and a member of the Committee on Rules, who was also a member of that congress, was requested by the committee to prepare the rules and to support them in the discussion before the Conference.

The parliamentary practices of the Latin and the Anglo-Saxons nations being so widely different, the rules reported by the committee of seven, of whom six were Latin members and only one an Anglo-Saxon member, met with great opposition on the part of the United States delegates. A long discussion of each article, which lasted for several weeks, ensued. This discussion, which was mainly sustained by the Argentine delegates, cordially

supported by Señor Alfonso, a Chilian delegate and the chairman of the committee, showed at once the firmness of character of both sets of delegates, who were not quite disposed to accept the modifications suggested to them, especially by the United States delegates, even though these were not of much consequence. This was an indication of what was to happen later on more important subjects. The rules were finally approved substantially as they were presented by the committee.

Señor Quintana, realizing his own merit and worth, and influenced always by firm convictions, was not ready to yield in such points as might be considered of a secondary nature, as in some cases it is indispensable to do for the purpose of obtaining the cordial and spontaneous support of an assembly wherein, necessarily, different views exist. Tact, which, in such a case, consists in yielding on secondary points for the purpose of securing the principal ones,—although frequently there are differences of opinion as to which are the principal and which the secondary points,—perhaps is a characteristic of weaker minds.

Mr. Henderson, the chairman of the United States delegation, possessed somewhat similar convictions, and for this reason the discussions which had a more lively character, and sometimes went so far as to be personal, were those which took place between this gentleman and Señor Quintana. The Argentine delegates, inspired by the great progress of their country, and having no political relations and no business of any importance with the United States, showed an independence which in every case was very laudable ; but sometimes, perhaps, on account of their personal qualities, displayed an extraordinary and exquisite susceptibility. Whatever may have been disagreeable in the discussions of the Conference was disposed of, however, in a satisfactory manner by the following remark of Mr. Henderson in closing the session : “ If in that freedom of speech a word of acrimony has been used, let us now consider it expunged from the record, and resolve to forget it forever.”

Soon after the Conference met, some papers in this country began to attack the Argentine delegates with extraordinary and unjustifiable rudeness, even going so far as to say that they were paid agents of England for the purpose of preventing the success of the Conference. Such uncalled-for and ungrounded attacks caused, as was only natural, a strong reaction, by which the merit

of those gentlemen was brought out, and the reflections upon them were disposed of in such a successful manner that they did not appear any more thereafter. Any unpleasant feeling which these comments may have caused the Argentine delegates was, certainly, abundantly compensated for by the satisfaction they must have felt when they were so victoriously and successfully defended.

Although I realize how disagreeable it is to come down to personal matters, I think it indispensable, with a view to a better understanding of what happened in the Conference, to make some explanation of affairs of this nature. Mr. William E. Curtis, who had acted as secretary and at last as a member of the South American Commission sent out by President Arthur, in 1884, for the purpose of promoting trade with South America, was appointed by Mr. Blaine to take charge of the work preparatory to the meeting of the Conference, and especially to supervise the excursion which the government of the United States arranged in honor of the delegates. It seems that it was the wish of Mr. Curtis, and supposedly it was the intent of Mr. Blaine, that he should act as secretary of the Conference ; but Mr. Curtis was not a *persona grata* to the delegates, as the publication of his book, "The Capitals of South America," had caused some dissatisfaction against him in those states, and it was said that he had made several serious errors and uncomplimentary remarks in speaking of their capitals. This would not have been strange, taking into consideration that his visit to each city was a very short one, and remembering how difficult it is under such circumstances to know and understand a country, and, still more, to write about it without making errors, which must almost always be to the detriment of the country treated of.

The Committee on Rules presented a resolution, which was approved by the Conference at its second meeting, to elect two secretaries, one to take charge of the Spanish work and the other of the English, both to be conversant with each language, and both elected directly by the Conference. The Secretary of State accepted this resolution out of deference to the Conference, notwithstanding that the law which convened the assembly gave him the appointment of all its clerks ; and his right to do this was still more clear because the salaries of the secretaries were paid by the United States government. As Mr. Curtis did not

know Spanish, he was prevented from being a secretary ; Mr. Blaine then appointed him executive officer of the Conference, and he acted up to the end as chief of all the clerks. I must state here, in justice to Mr. Curtis, that during the time he served in this capacity he succeeded in dispelling many of the unfavorable views which existed regarding him.

I always thought that the excursion in honor of the delegates was barren, at least so far as the delegates were concerned. Most of them knew this country well, and those who did not could hardly form an adequate idea of it in such a rapid trip. Some of those who took an active part in the proceedings of the Conference, among them the Argentine delegates, did not join it, despite the fact that they were specially invited by Mr. Blaine ; and although Señor Quintana accompanied the excursion for a few days, he returned to Washington as soon as he could. If any favorable result grew out of the excursion, it was most likely among the inhabitants of the cities visited by the delegates, on account of the good impression which may have proceeded from their personal acquaintance, although it was very superficial. This may, too, have dispelled some wrong views that had been entertained. Those who enjoyed the excursion principally were the young men, attachés of delegations, and others who joined it.

The notoriety acquired by a person who acted as Spanish secretary of the Conference makes it necessary to say a few words about him. Señor Don Fidel G. Pierra is a Cuban who has lived many years in New York, where, I understand, he has some commercial business. He accompanied the Spanish-American delegates on the excursion which preceded the Conference, as representative of the Spanish-American Commercial Union of New York, and secured their acquaintance and friendship by rendering them services as an interpreter and in other ways. The Conference elected him Spanish secretary ; but, on account of his peculiar temperament and disposition, he was not able to remain very long in that place, although he had the good-will and support of the Latin-American delegates. He complained that he did not have competent clerks to assist him, and he thought the executive clerk, Mr. Curtis, was unfriendly ; he also alleged that the salary assigned to him by the Department of State was not sufficient compensation for his work,

although it was higher than the salary of the Assistant Secretaries of State, and as high as the highest paid to clerks of the Conference. Finally his resignation was accepted, and since then he has sent to South American newspapers scurrilous correspondence, in which he states incorrectly several incidents connected with the Conference, and abuses the United States delegates, being thus guilty of the plainest breach of propriety.

The President of the United States fixed the 2d of October, 1889, as the date for the meeting of the Conference. Two days before, the delegates assembled in Washington, excepting those of Ecuador, Paraguay, and Hayti, who had not arrived, and held a preparatory meeting to agree upon their organization. The first question which was presented to them was the election of a president.

It is an act of courtesy, sanctioned by the example of diplomatic congresses and conferences which have met hitherto, that a representative of the inviting government, on whose territory the conference meets, should be elected president; and therefore all the delegates agreed that the president should be a member of the United States delegation. The Latin-American delegates were not in accord as to the gentleman whom they intended to elect president: some thought that Mr. Henderson, being the chairman of the United States delegation, ought to be chosen; others were disposed to vote for Mr. Trescot, because he had had great experience in diplomatic affairs, and was supposed to be better fitted for the position. Perhaps this difference of opinion determined the United States delegation to propose that the president should not be one of their own number, and to suggest that the Secretary of State should be elected; although it was said at the time that this suggestion came from President Harrison himself. A technical objection was at once presented—whether a functionary of this government who was not a member of the Conference, not being a delegate, could be made president; but this objection, which was only one of form, was happily solved, since the Secretary of State represented his country in a truer sense than the ten United States delegates together. Hence if the election was to be made for the purpose of fulfilling a duty of courtesy towards the inviting government, that duty could be most satisfactorily performed by choosing the Secretary of State, even though he were not a del-

egate. On the other hand, the high position of this functionary made his election as president an act befitting the dignity of the Conference. Although several delegates objected at first to his election, all were satisfied with the foregoing explanation, excepting the Argentine representatives, who stated that they could not vote for him because he was not a member of the Conference. With a view of not casting a negative vote, they decided not to be present at the first meeting of the Conference, when the president was selected; but both of them attended the official banquet which Mr. Blaine gave on that day to the delegates. The judgment of the Argentine delegates is certainly entitled to great weight, but it is not likely that they alone were right in this matter; and if this incident involved a question of the dignity and independence of the delegates, it is not probable that only the delegates of one among the fourteen States represented in the Conference would have entertained such an opinion. If this objection had been a valid one, those presenting it would not have attended the subsequent meetings of the Conference, as they were presided over by a gentleman who, in their opinion, was not qualified to be its president.

Subsequent events, and especially those which occurred during the last meetings of the Conference, showed in a very clear manner how wise was the election of Mr. Blaine, because he was invested with full powers to negotiate with the Latin-American delegates—powers which were really broader than those of the United States delegation—and because, on the other hand, possessing exquisite tact and a great desire to prevent the failure of a high purpose in an assembly of which he was the promoter, he went further in order to come to an agreement with the Latin-American delegates than in all probability the United States delegation would have deemed themselves authorized to go.

M. ROMERO.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]